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ABSTRACT

Marketing in the community college serves to expand recruitment efforts in order to reach all members of the community, as a way to distribute information about the college, and as a means to discover new markets of students. The primary purpose of marketing is to increase the community's awareness of the college through better and more complete information, with the dual intent of attracting new students and satisfying existing ones. A successful marketing plan consists of six steps: (1) develop a supportive attitude towards marketing among college personnel utilizing a marketing coordinator and a marketing workshop: (2) conduct an audit of current marketing functions to determine the status of the college's markets, the feelings of students and community members toward the college, the college's competitors, social-environmental factors, the objectives and organization of the marketing efforts, the effectiveness and distribution of the college's programs, and the use of advertising: (3) conduct an assessment of the community's educational needs: (4) use the resultant information for market segmentation and to develop an image for the college: (5) develop strategies to increase enrollment based on the college's objectives and chosen image and on the market to be reached; and (6) evaluate marketing efforts. This descriptive report is appended by an outline of the marketing audit. (AYC)

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Marketing in a Community College

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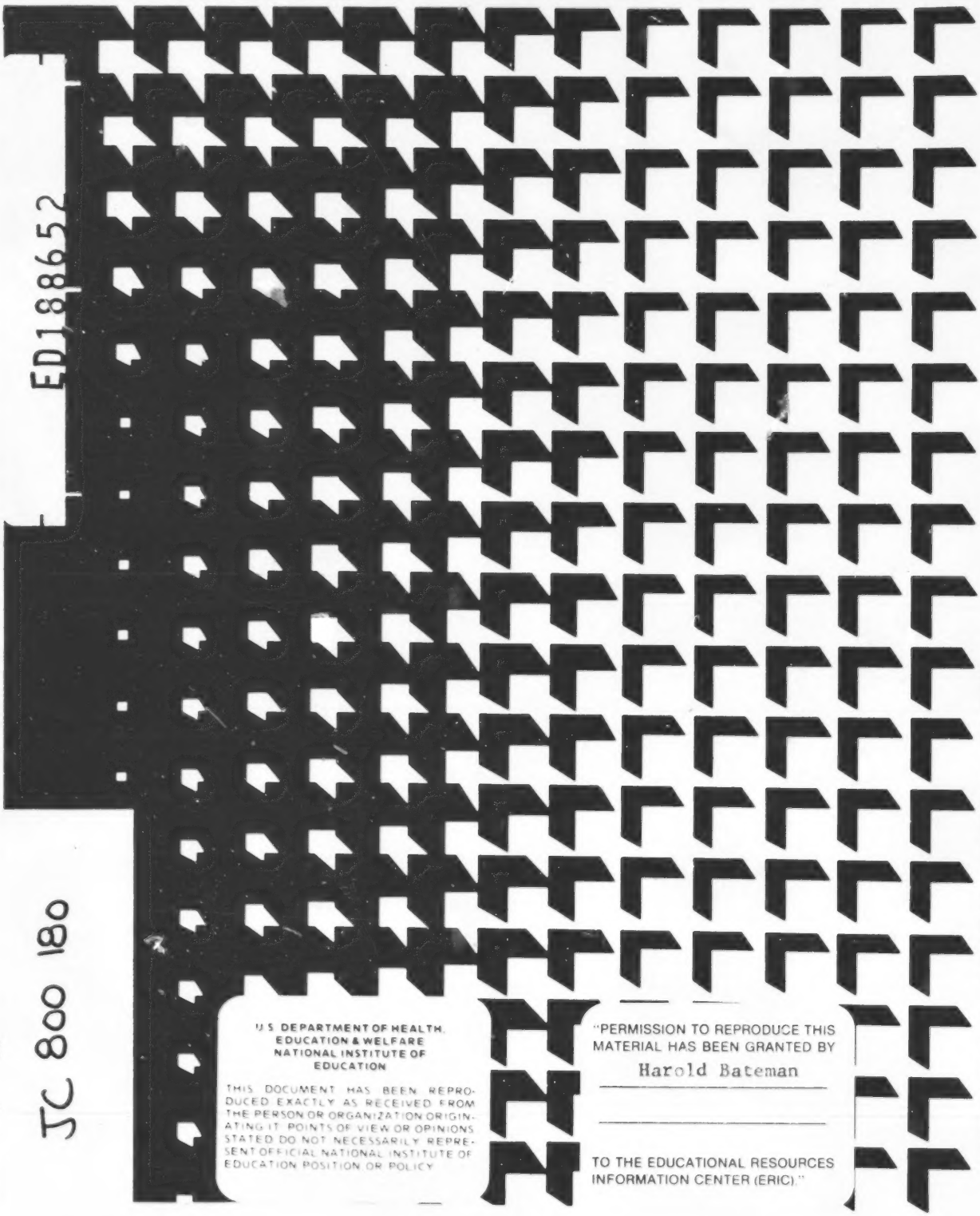

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Marketing in a Community College

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November 1979

"It is not very difficult to persuade people to do what they are longing to do." Aldous Huxley

INTRODUCTION

Only during the past few years has marketing become a major administrative effort in the community colleges. There are a multitude of reasons for this new emphasis, but primarily it is due to declining or stable enrollments. People were flocking to the community colleges through the mid '70's, and there was no need to encourage people to attend college. Today, the number of people wishing to attend a community college has declined, and the competition for these potential students among the colleges has intensified. Consequently, college marketing programs are being developed to attract a larger share of the limited number of students. One author has noted that as the competition for new students increases, marketing will become critical for institutional stability.[1]

The purpose of this report is to define the marketing function, why marketing is needed in the community colleges, and present a marketing "plan". This last topic is not intended to be a cookbook of how to market a community college, but rather to present an outline of the marketing process.

WHAT IS MARKETING

Basically, marketing is a recruitment and retention tool. It has been described as a way of thinking about one's responsibilities in responding to the needs of students and, secondly, to the needs of the institution.[2] Community college marketing is not a program using fast pitch artists, hacksters, or slick brochures!

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[1]Johnson, Dennis L., "Marketing the 'Un-Cola' College", Community and Junior College Journal. Dec./Jan. 1977-78, pp. 14-17.

[2]See: Larkin, Paul G., 1979, and Leach Ernest R., 1977.

The most complete definition of marketing is provided by Philip Kotler in his highly acclaimed book, Marketing for Non-Profit Institutions. His definition is:

> Marketing is the effective management by an organization of its exchange relationships with its various markets and publics. All organizations depend upon exchange relations to attract resources that they need, to convert them into useful products and services, and to distribute them effectively to target markets. Marketing is a systematic approach to planning and achieving desired exchange relations with other groups.[3]

This general definition is completely applicable to community colleges.

Using Kotler's definition as a fulcrum, marketing in the community college serves:

1. As an expansion of recruitment. Recruitment in the community colleges has traditionally been marketing of the college for high school seniors. Today's community college is designed to serve all people in the community and should market attractive educational opportunities for the different diverse groups of people in the community.
2. As a way to distribute information about the college. The decision to attend college and which college to attend is based upon a large set of information. This information includes the class schedule, reports on the quality of teaching, data on the success of graduates, etc.[4]
3. As a means to discover new markets or students. As more people decide to attend the college, the college will be able to attract additional resources due to the increased enrollment.

WHY MARKETING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The primary purpose of marketing is to increase the community's awareness of the college through better and more complete information. This information

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[3]See: Kotler, Philip, 1975, p. 13. This book is recommended reading for any person involved in community college marketing.

[4]Authors who have stressed the importance of distributing information include; Breyer, Carol Ann, 1979; Larkin, Paul A., 1979; Leach, Ernest R., 1978; and Rinnander, Elizabeth, 1977.

leads to more informed, rational choices. For example, many people believe the principal (and possibly the only) function of community colleges is to prepare students for transfer to a four year college. Lack of information has fostered the continuance of this belief. Marketing is a means to show people that community colleges offer many educational alternatives.

Marketing has two interrelated functions: attracting new students and satisfying existing students. The first brings immediate benefits to the college; the second results in long term benefits. Both functions are important for institutional stability.

One community college which reported substantial enrollment increases after beginning a marketing program is Prince George's Community College, Largo, Maryland. Enrollment increased 15% and credit hours increased 12% the first term following initiation of the marketing program.[5] Although such a rapid increase may be unique, any increase means added income for the college.

For an institution to maintain income and enrollment stability over time, the college must have satisfied users. Many of the college's students attend at irregular intervals or return after prolonged absences. Eventhough these students do not maintain continuous enrollment for two years, they are satisfied users. Many community college students attend because of the influence of their parents or their friends who are satisfied users. In fact, research continues to show that the decision to attend college by recent high school graduates is heavily, if not predominantly, influenced by parents.[6] Satisfied students are probably, therefore, the best marketing technique in which to attract new students to the college. Consequently, the long-term stability of the college is a function of the satisfaction of its students.

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[5]See: Leach, Ernest R., 1977-78.

[6]See: Carden, Thomas E., 1978, and in particular, Sandell, Steven H., 1976.

THE MARKETING PLAN

The college's marketing plan must assume a high stature in the college's structure. It must be supported by the board of trustees, the president, the administrators, the faculty, and the support staff. Likewise, it is important to develop a supportive attitude towards marketing as it is the initial step in the college marketing plan.[8]

The second step is conducting an audit of current marketing functions. The task during this step is to assess the status of the college's markets, its competitors, and social-environmental factors. Each of these factors affects enrollment, and the college's marketing plan should be designed to influence their course. Appendix A presents a comprehensive marketing audit. A detailed review of the audit is important in determining the appropriate emphasis for the marketing plan.

Many of the questions in the marketing audit may be difficult to resolve initially. Market research is one method that is effective in obtaining answers to these questions. In non-profit organizations, a form of market research is a needs study. Needs studies are an extension of the traditional education planning system. Needs assessment adds to the planning process the needs, perceptions, preferences, and satisfaction with the college of the community members and students. Needs assessments will allow educational planners to fit instructional programs to the community's needs.[9]

Many community college districts in California have completed needs assessments. Los Angeles and Los Rios are two community college districts

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[8]For more details on attitudes towards marketing, see: Johnson, Dennis L., 1977-78 and 1979.

[9]The importance of needs assessment studies have been discussed by: Howard, William R., 1979; Johnson, Dennis L., 1977-78 and 1979; Kotler, Philip, 1975; and Leach, Ernest R., 1977-78.

which have conducted needs studies recently. Los Rios used the Gallup organization to survey their community members. Other districts, including the Coast Community College District, are planning needs studies.[10]

The information obtained from a needs assessment provides important data for developing the market plan. This information is then used for market segmentation and positioning. These are steps three and four in the market plan.

Market segmentation divides members of the community into different groups based upon demographic features. These demographic features may include age, cultural background, previous education, income level, area of residence, sex, etc. Needs assessment will provide information on needs unique to each of the groups. Market segmentation allows strategies to be developed for each of these community groups.

After segmenting the market, the college should position itself properly within the market.[11] Market positioning states how the college wants itself represented to the community. The college must display different images to each of the market segments. As a community college this is a difficult job since the different images must be displayed without interfering with or damaging one another. For example, an image of a freshman-sophomore school offering only transfer curriculum would be disastrous for enrollment of occupational students.

The next step in the market plan is developing the strategies to increase enrollment. Effective strategies are a function of needs studies, market

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[10]The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) has developed an extensive needs assessment system for use by colleges. They refer to it as Community Impact Studies.

[11]See: Garther, Gerald H., 1977; Kotler, Philip, 1975; and Larkin, Paul, 1979 for more information on market segmentation and positioning.

segmentation, and market positioning. Otherwise, marketing strategies revert to a trial and error process.

Marketing strategies should be unique and innovative. Some of the more widely used include distributing brochures and pamphlets, mailing class schedules to all families in the community, making public service announcements on radio and television, setting up information booths at shopping centers, allowing latitude in the timing of the application process to provide flexibility for the students, and sending counselors to the district's feeder high schools.[12] The appropriate strategy will depend on the objectives of the college, the image the college wishes to convey, and for which market segment the strategy was developed.

The final step in the plan is the marketing evaluation. This is the time to determine if the benefits received by implementing the market plan are worth the costs. The evaluation process should be an integral part of the total marketing plan. The plan must be developed so it can be evaluated. Strategies may be efficient and effective but if they cannot be evaluated, it is difficult to decide whether or not to continue their use.

Each strategy, market segmentation and positioning decision should be subject to an evaluation. Only those parts of the plan that are efficient should be maintained. All others should be discarded or replaced. The final product should result in an efficient and effective marketing plan.

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[12] In particular, see Leach, Ernest R., 1977, for a comprehensive list of marketing strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

The marketing process at the community college is a major task that requires the support of all members of the college's staff. Gaining acceptance of the marketing approach may be the most difficult part of the marketing plan to complete. Unless there is total commitment, unanticipated consequences may result from implementation of the plan.

Several methods have been suggested to gain acceptance of the plan.[13] Two themes dominate the suggestions. These two are the marketing coordinator and marketing workshop. The marketing coordinator has responsibility for implementing and evaluating the marketing plan. This person should be a catalyst in the marketing process by gaining support of all members of the college's staff.

The marketing workshop is a tool that can be used to involve more of the staff in the marketing process. The workshop can consist of a review and evaluation of the current marketing plan, a panel of faculty and staff members presenting what each employee group can do to aid the marketing process, or discussion of related topics as how marketing can improve student retention. A workshop allows more people to become involved in the marketing plan. And, as more people become involved in the marketing, the acceptance and implementation of the marketing process becomes an easier task.

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[13]See: Graither, Gerald, 1979; Howard, William R., 1979; Johnson, Dennis L., 1977-78 and 1979; and Larkin, Paul G., 1979.

Appendix A

The Marketing Audit[14]

Part I: The Marketing Environment

A. Markets
   1. Who are SAC's major markets or potential students?
   2. What are the major segments in each market?
   3. What are the present and future size and the characteristics of each market segment?

B. Students
   4. How do the students and the community members feel toward and perceive SAC?
   5. Why do applicants decide to enroll at SAC?
   6. What is the present and expected future state of student needs?

C. Competitors
   7. Who are SAC major competitors?
   8. What trends can be seen in competition?

D. Social Environment
   9. What are the main developments with respect to demography, economy, technology, government, and culture that affects SAC's enrollment?

E. Objectives
   10. What are SAC's long-run and short-run overall objectives and marketing objectives?
   11. Are the objectives stated in a clear hierarchial order and in a form that permits planning and measurement of achievement?
   12. Are the marketing objectives reasonable for SAC given its competitive position, resources, and opportunities?

F. Organization
   13. Does SAC have a high level marketing officer to analyze, plan, and implement the marketing plan?
   14. Do all people involved in the marketing process have adequate training and understanding of marketing?
   15. Does SAC's personnel understand and practice the marketing concept?

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[14]The marketing audit described in appendix A is based on a similar audit in: Kotler, Philip, 1975. A more comprehensive audit is provided by Kotler. The questions presented here are those which are most applicable to community colleges.

Part II: Detailed Marketing Activity Review

A. Programs
   16. Should any programs or classes be phased out?
   17. Should any programs or classes be added?
   18. What is the general state of health of each program and the program mix as a whole?

B. Distribution
   19. Are there alternative methods of distributing the programs or classes that would result in more service or less cost?
   20. Does SAC render adequate service along with its programs or classes for its students?

C. Advertising
   21. Does SAC adequately state its advertising objectives?
   22. Does SAC use the right amount of advertising?
   23. Are the themes and copy effective?
   24. Are the media well chosen?
   25. Does SAC have a carefully formulated program of publicity?

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